
Republican Education



WHAT WE NEED
TO KNOW TO WIN

FIVE POINTS FOR SUCCESSFUL CONFRONTATION WITH YOUR POLITICAL OPPONENTS

1. Know your opponents' position

Learn the arguments the establishment uses to justify their oppression of our people, and challenge them.

2. Know your opponents' weakness

Identify contradictions in your opponents' arguments and strategies. Your opponents' ignorance is one of your strongest weapons.

3. Know your own position

Activists must be well-informed of the republican position and Sinn Fein strategies. Convince the people by confronting your opponents.

4. Know your weakness

Search out weak points through internal discussion and debate. Strengthen weak links or replace them.

5. Muster support

Counter-act establishment propaganda by organising events in the community which create learning situations and greater awareness among the people.

Your task as a republican is to translate this into events and action in your community and to create networks of activists throughout the community.

Republican education what we need to know to win

EDUCATION in Sinn Féin is a key feature of our current strategy. The success of our challenge to establishment power structures depends on our members becoming competent *activists* moving forward with a clear and up-to-date analysis of the situation and equipped with all the necessary skills — in organising, leadership and communication — to make things happen within the community.

We've found it necessary to develop our own education programme. Republican education is different from what people have been subjected to in the school systems, both in format and in purpose. We use education to develop our most valuable resource: our personnel. By increasing the effectiveness of our activists within the community, we strengthen our organisation and its capacity to lead the struggle of the Irish people. Republican education operates totally on the basis of **what we need to know to win** our struggle.

Republican education is not simply, or even primarily, a matter of organising lectures or workshops. It requires creating situations where people learn. (In fact, a lecture may well be one of the situations where people are *least* likely to learn anything.) The means of achieving this objective of creating learning situations will be unique to each area and even for each member. Not only does this require the education officer to experiment with a variety of educational experiences for their area, but also that s/he involve **everyone**, especially local leaders, with organising and recruiting responsibilities, in developing a successful education programme in their area.

One of the most important tasks facing us is to create among republicans a commitment to an ongoing **process of self-education**. This necessity has emerged from our growing awareness that the success of our struggle depends on republicans constantly utilising opportunities to learn how to struggle more effectively. No one but ourselves can ensure that we have what it takes to win: specific skills as well as political awareness. The education officers at various levels are accountable to the organisation for educational development and activity in their area, but **every** republican has a responsibility for making a success by their contribution and involvement.

THE EDUCATION BRIEF

The education officer's responsibility is to create and implement a programme category for three basic educational needs:-

A **basic course** which all members are required to complete. This typi-



● The basic education course should provide the necessary background on how to deal with harassment by British crown forces or Free State forces

cally consists of a day-school, *Introduction to Sinn Fein*, and a workshop, *Roles for Sinn Fein Activists* — the formation, of course, to be adapted to suit local needs. Sample agendas are available.

A series of events organised for **continuing education** designed to provoke discussion, re-examination and analysis of our situation and strategies we've developed to deal with it — through internal Sinn Fein debates, public lectures, films, videos, speakers etc.

Specific skills training — in publicity, organising, communication and leadership — which are necessary to carry out our work effectively both within the community and within our organisation.

In addition, because republican organising, recruiting and education are so inter-related, the education officer must work with local leadership in these areas, and has a special responsibility for developing an **effective recruiting programme** (see leaflet on *Developing a Recruiting Scheme*).

BASIC COURSE

All new members must complete an introductory course before being admitted to full membership of Sinn Fein. It is the responsibility of the education officer to provide necessary background on the following:-

1. Security. Political security — what is it?; legal rights and how to deal with harassment by crown forces or gardai; how to behave if arrested.

2. National aims of Sinn Fein. The purpose of Sinn Fein, its task and how Sinn Fein work assists the overall struggle, and why there is a need for a

distinct political resistance to the Brits (distribute *What is Sinn Fein?* leaflet).

3. Social and economic policies of Sinn Fein. The social and economic dimension should be simply explained (the *Social Agitation* booklet should be distributed at the end of the session).

4. Structures and organisation of Sinn Fein cumainn, comhairle ceantair regional and national structures including departments, and how they relate to each other. How the individual activist relates to all this; the forms of full and associate membership; what you need to know to use our organisation effectively.

5. Constitution and rules. Distribute Constitution after presentation.

6. Brief history of Sinn Fein. Illustrate with slides if possible. It is not adequate to familiarise people with names and dates, this **must** be analytical. Our activists must understand how our political struggle **developed** and learn the lessons of the past — how strategies worked or failed. Distribute *Freedom Struggle* leaflet after presentation.

Your responsibility is to provide Sinn Fein members with necessary information on these topics, *not* (necessarily) to run them through a set of lectures. **How** you do it, within these guidelines, is up to you. You are responsible for making the programme interesting and relevant for your area.

It must be interesting and attractive otherwise people won't attend. Experiment with different formats — Derry, for example, developed a day-long workshop for new members which got very positive feedback from the participants.

Use slides, videos or films, guest speakers — anything to create an interesting event. There's no ruling that says you have to call it education either — many people have a lot of bad memories about school, books, teachers, etc, which will turn them off at the idea of republican education. Describe events as workshops or anything else that might not sound as boring as lectures. Although printed lectures are available from Head Office on a variety of topics, assess their value yourself. **Reading them out** to people works



● If an educational event is interesting and attractive then you'll have no problem in getting people to attend

like a sleeping tablet. These are only **notes** to help you create your **own** presentation.

Discussion after a presentation is **at least** as important as the presentation itself. So put some real effort and thought into stimulating this. Discussion is where people put what they've seen/heard/learnt into the context of their own local situation and work as Sinn Fein activists. Hand out written material **after** your presentation or discussion otherwise people will leaf through it instead of listening or participating.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

An extremely important aspect of our task is to organise a series of events for our membership (internal Sinn Fein debates, public lectures, films, videos, speakers etc) designed to provoke discussion, re-examination and analysis of our situation and the strategies we've developed to deal with it.

While it is obviously stimulating and useful to organise public events such as debates, speakers, films etc, it is necessary to organise **internal** educational events as well. Not only do many Sinn Fein members often feel inadequate arguing the republican viewpoint with the public because they haven't yet acquired public speaking skills, but quite often we've failed to thrash out among ourselves a clear understanding of republican policy, how it applies to our specific local situation, and whether it will work.

Organised **debates** within the republican community are a lively and useful format for this. Debates **should** be controversial: *Can revolutionaries be local councillors? What about the Church and our struggle? Are republicans becoming reformist?* Remember: in a debate, participants don't necessarily have to believe in the position they argue for — thus the structure of the debate allows people to raise issues, take positions and float ideas they would be unwilling to suggest in real life. Arguing against something you believe in is an extremely effective way of strengthening your own argument because it helps you to understand your opponents' viewpoint thoroughly.

The object of the debate is **not** to push a line but to spark off discussion and thought among republicans. Develop your topics in relation to the needs and interests in your area — what might be a hot debate in Belfast or Tralee might be irrelevant or (worse) **boring** in other areas.

Outside speakers, video films and seminars can be used to create both internal and public educational events. People like to hear outside speakers and see new faces. Use the Speakers List from Head Office and put pressure on national and regional levels to supply outside speakers.

Use **republican structures** to build education into all Sinn Fein activity. Get your officer board involved and examine your cumann and comhairle ceantair meetings. Tighten up the chairing and organisation so that the business portion can be gone through quickly and efficiently, then build political education into every meeting: discussing some aspect of your current community involvement, developing a local strategy in light of a particular republican policy, analysing the process of some campaign you're working on, always in a spirit of constructive criticism and trying to learn honestly from mistakes.

Get **Sinn Fein members to expect and demand more** from meetings, from officers, from regional structures and Head Office, and, of course, from themselves. The apathy of each individual is responsible for our failures, just as intelligent activity is responsible for success.

The success of our struggle and our ability to attract more new activists



● **Sinn Fein youth at a cultural class** – education can still appeal to people if it is presented in the right way

depends on how seriously we approach our work. If we tolerate inefficiency in our organisation (e.g. 'republican time' and 'passenger' members) few will take us seriously or be prepared to make a commitment to us.

Even when activists hold full-time jobs and thus cannot be full-time workers for Sinn Fein their **commitment** should be full-time.

Use your Constitution and rules to get rid of dead wood, if necessary, but always remember that it is far better to **motivate** people to work to capacity.

Community educational events are a valuable means of challenging establishment beliefs, raising Sinn Fein's profile with the public, and bringing the broader (e.g. non-republican community) into contact with Sinn Fein. This also develops republican awareness of our accountability to the community by tying us into real community concerns.

Use a bit of imagination in organising such events. Don't think they always have to be overtly sponsored by Sinn Fein or focus on a republican issue. Your aim should be to create a public forum where issues vital to republican interests can be raised and discussed and the republican viewpoint presented. A panel of guest speakers can take a topic: for example, Gerry Adams and Des Wilson on *Republicanism and Socialism*, or perhaps the SDLP, Sinn Fein and the Church and an academic on *Crime within the Community*, defining the issues and working towards solutions. Think tactically – if you have reason to want a mixed platform it may be more effective to organise a group unconnected with Sinn Fein to sponsor the event and invite the speakers. Other times, especially in conjunction with community agitation, Sinn Fein personnel can organise films or speakers on a topic of high interest to the

community — drugs, for example. Don't limit your topics to traditionally republican ones, but don't neglect them either — strip-searching, new oppressive laws etc. Encourage topics which expose the contradictions between the legitimate demands of the people and the state itself. Prepare well for these public events, make sure they are successful on the night, then **follow up** with discussion in your cumann or comhairle ceantair.

SKILLS TRAINING

It is your responsibility to make available training in specific skills which are essential if our members are to become competent **activists**, working effectively both in Sinn Fein and within the community. This includes the skills required for community work and organising (setting up and running advice centres, doing housing and local welfare work etc); communication; publicity (writing/taking photographs for *An Phoblacht/Republican News* and the local media, creating a publicity campaign from local issues, developing necessary contacts etc); election work (training canvassers and polling agents, running a local campaign, roles and responsibilities of workers, profiling candidates etc); public speaking; Sinn Fein organising; and other topics. See *Education Questionnaire* for ideas on useful specific skills.

RESOURCES

At the National Education Conference held on September 30th 1984, educational resources currently available from Sinn Fein were presented and discussed. These include (not in any order of importance) a basic course, policy documents, a republican lecture series, various skills workshops on request, and a Speakers List. Other resources which should be utilised include *AP/RN*, the Research Department, a proposed video library, Republican Publications (posters, *Notes for Revolutionaries* etc), the national leadership, including specialised departments (Women, Trade Union, Agriculture, Culture, Publicity, Foreign Affairs etc).

Use videos, slide projectors etc, for these various events. You **don't** need to buy them. Look on the community as a resource. Teachers, schools, parishes, youth clubs, community centres and workshops all have these things available to you. **But be sure** you always know how to operate and look after the equipment, and return it promptly afterwards in one piece.

As an education officer, you need to be a **resource person** putting people in contact not only with the **information** they require, but with other **people** who have skills and ideas to share (see 'twinning' proposal). Examine your community for the resources it offers — courses, skills training, libraries, interesting speakers etc. See what is available that we can utilise, and encourage republicans to use such opportunities to develop themselves.

Use your initiative. Creating successful republican education requires that you experiment and share your experiences of success and failure with other republicans. Good communication with Sinn Fein on this is essential — a successful republican education programme can only be created with **your input**.

Whatever you organise, make it **interesting** — you can't (and shouldn't try to) force people to educational events. Make the events **attractive**. There's only one mortal sin for an education officer and that's to be **boring**.

Any problem? Ideas to share? Contact the Education Officer, c/o Ard Oifig.
